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## Russia's Growing HIV Epidemic

Cristi Hillis and Kristen Friesen

The terms HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), typically first call to mind Africa. But increasingly the public is coming to realize that HIV infection rates are also soaring in countries like Russia, Ukraine, India, and China. In fact, HIV is spreading more rapidly in Russia than in any other country in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

### A Brief Overview of the Epidemic in Russia

In the early 1990s, HIV rates in Russia were negligible. As late as 1996, there were less than 300 reported HIV-infected persons in the entire country, but only five years later, in 2001, that number had skyrocketed to 90,000. Currently, around one percent of the population of Russia is HIV-infected, which places Russia third among countries with the highest number of HIV cases outside Africa.<sup>2</sup>

The epidemic in Russia has spread consistently through unclean needles in the drug culture.<sup>3</sup> According to 2006 data from the U.S. government's Centers for Disease Control, HIV sero-prevalence (the percent of a population testing positive for infection in a blood test) among injection drug users in Russia runs as high as 78 percent, whereas rates among those engaged in commercial sex are at a comparatively low 14 percent. Over 80 percent of AIDS cases in Russia occur among people between the ages of 15 and 30.<sup>4</sup> Within that age group, injection drug users, orphans and street children, and commercial sex workers are at the greatest risk of contracting HIV.<sup>5</sup>

Each of these at-risk groups requires careful attention, but a relationship between HIV/AIDS and orphans has been largely overlooked and warrants special mention. While the global community has been aware for years of the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS on children, making orphans of countless numbers of them, it has failed to realize the drastic impact the orphan crisis can have on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The situation in Russia presents a picture of the synergy of HIV/AIDS and the orphan problem. In Russia, street children who have lived in orphanages are two times more likely to be HIV positive than those who grew up in homes.<sup>6</sup> Strategies to fight HIV/AIDS around the world must take into account the importance of the modern orphan crisis because many of today's orphans will be tomorrow's AIDS patients. Due to the magnitude of the HIV problem in Russia, a concentrated effort is required to effectively combat it. Everyone from government leaders to Sunday school teachers has a valuable role in the fight against this epidemic by stepping up and taking action.

### Government Attempts to Curb the Epidemic

The Russian government is now taking positive

steps in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Government spending on HIV/AIDS and hepatitis increased from \$140 million in 2006 to \$300 million in 2007, and the state has established a federal AIDS center, as well as 88 regional AIDS centers. In April 2006, President Vladimir Putin stated, "Carrying out preventive work among the groups most at risk of HIV infection is of vital importance."<sup>7</sup> Particular progress has been made in the area of mother-to-child HIV transmission. Through the government prevention program, overall transmission rates from mother-to-child have been reduced from approximately 35 percent to 5 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the government has committed to providing anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment for everyone infected with HIV in Russia. Unfortunately, the reality is that ARV treatments often do not reach the people for whom they are intended.<sup>9</sup> ARVs have a short shelf life and frequently sit in storage past their expiration date while officials deal with red tape. Another obstacle is the failure of lower-level officials to distribute the drugs. Recently, administrators of a large rehabilitation center not far from one of Russia's major cities revealed that while over half of their program participants are HIV positive, not a single one of them had been receiving ARVs from the state. Rehabilitation center staff had visited the city AIDS center many times only to be repeatedly turned away. Tanya, a single mother of two children and a patient at the rehab center, was in the advanced stages of AIDS. Staff were concerned that she would not live much longer, and they could not afford the medications she needed. Thankfully, international leaders were able to intervene on Tanya's behalf with the city AIDS center to get ARVs, not only for her, but also for all of the other HIV-positive residents of that particular rehabilitation center.<sup>10</sup>

### The Response of NGOs and Government Agencies

Other governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from around the world are also increasingly active in combating HIV in Russia. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been working very closely with both the Russian government and NGOs, such as Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO), to fight the epidemic. The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also continue to provide critical funding to a variety of NGOs in Russia to stem the HIV tide.

In addition to large global groups like UNICEF and UNAIDS, many smaller NGOs are playing key roles in the fight against AIDS. One such group is

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Doctors of the World, based in St. Petersburg. This organization operates a drop-in center where street children are able to receive medical care as well as a friendly hug and a cup of tea. Outreach workers also spend three days a week getting to know street children where they live and educating these young people about their health-care options. Recently, Doctors of the World has been collaborating with the Centers for Disease Control to provide voluntary, free HIV testing for street children.<sup>11</sup> Those who are HIV positive receive ongoing counseling and are connected to clinics around St. Petersburg where they can receive anti-retroviral treatment.<sup>12</sup> It is critical to have groups such as Doctors of the World that can provide the medical care and treatment that the church and some Christian organizations are generally less equipped to offer.

### AIDS Ministries of Churches and Christian Organizations

Many church programs serving those with HIV in Russia have, of necessity, had small beginnings, largely due to the stigma within society, churchgoers included, against those who are HIV positive. Nevertheless, some churches are responding to the crisis and caring for people with HIV/AIDS in a wide variety of ways. One church outreach has been a visitation program to HIV/AIDS orphanages. This program, which includes holding babies, might appear to be a relatively small service, but in reality it is of great importance because it acts to break the pattern of prejudice, misinformation, and negative attitudes toward people living with HIV. It sends the message that one should not fear contracting HIV merely from touching an infant who is HIV positive.

Addressing the issue of HIV among injection drug users, Pentecostals, as well as other Christian groups, run a number of rehabilitation centers. Over 200 men and women participate in year-long rehabilitation programs in a facility at Kingisepp (Leningrad Region). Treatment includes character development, spiritual growth, job training, daily work on the center's farm, and HIV/AIDS treatment for those who need it.<sup>13</sup> This center has been a model which other drug rehabs across Russia have followed, including the well-known Betel and Ishod programs.

The Russian Orthodox Church began its anti-AIDS program in 2001, motivated in part by the alarming growth rate of HIV infection in Russia. The church focuses its efforts mainly in three areas: prevention of HIV in children and young people; spiritual, psychological, and social support services to individuals living with HIV; and hospice care.<sup>14</sup> The church's work on behalf of those affected by HIV also includes campaigns to raise awareness and to counteract the social stigma and prejudice associated with people living with the disease. Presently, over 100 Russian Orthodox churches in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus hold monthly prayer services for those affected by HIV. People who are HIV positive often attend these services, which in some churches are followed by support group meetings. The added benefit of these services is that they communicate to society that people affected

by AIDS are welcomed, not turned away by the church. Speaking at the Global Summit on AIDS and the Church in November 2007, Sister Margarita Nelyubova said, "The [Russian Orthodox] Church became aware that increasingly people who learn about their positive status turn to God. So the Church must be ready and well-equipped to help a person living with HIV or AIDS to find in the Church a caring family."<sup>15</sup>

In addition to churches, other Christian organizations working in Russia are engaged in the fight against HIV/AIDS. CrossRoads, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, and Children's HopeChest, a leading international orphan-care ministry, have collaborated to develop the Life at the CrossRoads (LATC) curriculum specifically for the orphan population. This 30-lesson program uses "innovative methods to help youth develop character and make more positive and healthy choices, helping them to avoid devastating crises like HIV/AIDS."<sup>16</sup> More information about this cooperative effort is detailed in Matt Kavagian's article, "An HIV/AIDS Ministry Partnership in Eastern Europe and Russia," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 15 (Fall 2007), 1-3.

Also working in partnership, Russian Ministries and its Moscow affiliate, the Association for Spiritual Renewal, joined with Tearfund (United Kingdom) to host the HIV/AIDS Forum of Good Practice and Networking in November 2006. This Moscow conference was attended by 153 individuals, representing 92 organizations from 13 countries. At the event, national evangelical leaders were equipped with training and resources, enabling them to more effectively address the HIV/AIDS crisis.<sup>17</sup>

Russian Ministries (RM) is actively responding to HIV/AIDS in other countries of the former Soviet Union as well. In Moldova, RM works with Pastor Vladimir Ubeivole, founder of The Beginning of Life. Ubeivole's efforts include education in public schools and universities on the prevention of HIV/AIDS (reaching 15,000 students annually). This ministry also provides support to individuals who are infected with HIV. In 2007, Ubeivole's ministry held a first-ever summer camp in Moldova for people living with HIV/AIDS.<sup>18</sup> At the camp, which was attended primarily by women and their children, staff shared the gospel message, and HIV-positive people, who typically face rejection by society, experienced acceptance and the love of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> The Beginning of Life's ministry model is being multiplied in Russia and Ukraine through Russian Ministries' School Without Walls program, which includes an HIV/AIDS component in its training for future church leaders.<sup>20</sup>

AIDS Care Education Training (ACET), with ANPO as its Russian acronym, has over 300 HIV educators actively working in 90 cities and towns throughout the country.<sup>21</sup> Trained volunteers raise awareness and present AIDS prevention programs in schools, universities, orphanages, drug rehabilitation centers, and prisons. ACET has also published two books in Russian on the topics of AIDS and sexual

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health, one of which, *AIDS and You* by Dr. Patrick Dixon, ACET international founder, contains case studies of Christian HIV/AIDS projects in Russia and Eastern Europe that have proven successful.

"The way of Jesus is clear," Dr. Dixon maintains. "A Christian AIDS response means we are called to express the unconditional love of God to all in need, regardless of how they come to be so. This is fundamental to the call of the church to serve the world."<sup>22</sup> To that end, an important aspect of ACET's work is to assist existing organizations in launching effective and compassionate AIDS ministries by providing training and resources.<sup>23</sup> The organization is a member of the ACET International Alliance, a network of independent groups responding to the AIDS crisis worldwide. ACET International has affiliates in Ukraine, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, and Slovenia, and is beginning work in other parts of the former Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup>

Numerous other Christian organizations are developing AIDS ministries in Russia as they seek to bring the love and hope of Christ to those affected by the disease.

### Resources for Responding to the Crisis

In November 2007 more than 1,700 people gathered at Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California, for the third annual Global Summit on AIDS and the Church, at which over 90 international speakers addressed attendees. The event called for cooperation among government agencies, the private sector, and religious communities in combating HIV/AIDS and emphasized how and why the church's involvement, in particular, is critical. Speaking at the Summit, Kay Warren, Executive Director of the HIV/AIDS Initiative at Saddleback Church, said, "People with HIV/AIDS need to have the invisible God made visible to them—that is our purpose. There are many things we don't know about this epidemic, but what we do know is that individuals living with this disease need at least six things: acceptance, hope, support, to know people care, a family, and our presence."<sup>25</sup>

Churches can be very effective in combating AIDS. When pastors lead the way in showing Christ-like compassion to those with HIV/AIDS, church members are more likely to become engaged as well. This principle is central to Pastor Rick and Kay Warren's "local church-based" strategy for mobilizing congregations worldwide to respond to the HIV crisis.<sup>26</sup> Valuable resources to assist churches in raising awareness and launching effective AIDS ministries are available at [www.purposedriven.net/hiv](http://www.purposedriven.net/hiv).

It is important to carefully consider the synergy of HIV/AIDS and the orphan crisis when formulating a response to the epidemic in Russia. The two are so inextricably linked that caring for orphans can also help avert the HIV crisis. Because young people in Russia are the most at-risk group for HIV, and the rates among orphans soar above those for children raised in homes, additional outreach to institutionalized children and those living on the streets can have a significant impact in preventing the spread of this disease.

Two networks, the U.S.-based CoMission for Children at Risk and its sister organization in Moscow, The Russian National Network for Children at Risk ([www.risknetwork.ru](http://www.risknetwork.ru)), assist churches, Christian organizations, and individuals in beginning or developing ministries to orphans. In addition to coordinating training and networking events, both groups maintain comprehensive websites that include profiles of hundreds of organizations serving at-risk children in the region, ministry materials in several languages, partnership opportunities, articles, statistics, and events calendars. The sites also contain useful information related to HIV/AIDS in Russia. Profiles of Christian organizations responding to Russia's HIV crisis, including those highlighted in this article, and resources to help individuals and groups begin or grow AIDS ministries are readily accessible at [www.comission.org/go/hiv](http://www.comission.org/go/hiv).

### Conclusion

There are positive signs of action by governments, NGOs, churches, and ministries in response to HIV in Russia, but much remains to be done to stem the flood of the country's rising AIDS epidemic. The vital importance of Christians in this battle cannot be overstated. Those affected by HIV need the compassionate care and support of Christians, and the church is uniquely equipped to deliver the message of hope that can both prevent the spread of AIDS and give strength to those who are suffering. ♦

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS, *2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic* (New York: UNAIDS, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS, *Country Situation Report: Russian Federation*, 2007; [http://www.unaids.org/en/Country/Responses/Countries/Russian\\_federation.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/Country/Responses/Countries/Russian_federation.asp).

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Susan Hillis, Centers for Disease Control, Personal Interview, 3 February 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Dmitry M. Kissin *et al.*, *HIV Sero-prevalence in Street Youth in St. Petersburg, Russia* (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Opening Remarks at State Council Presidium Meeting on Urgent Measures to Combat the Spread of HIV/AIDS in the Russian Federation; [www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/themes/2006/04/211932\\_104794.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/themes/2006/04/211932_104794.shtml), 21 April 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Susan Hillis, Centers for Disease Control, Personal Interview, 3 February 2008.

<sup>9</sup> UNAIDS, *Country Situation Report: Russian Federation*, 2007; [www.unaids.org/en/Country/Responses/Countries/Russian\\_federation.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/Country/Responses/Countries/Russian_federation.asp).

<sup>10</sup> Cristi Hillis interview with Tanya, 24 April 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Kissin, *HIV Sero-prevalence*.

<sup>12</sup> "Russia: Access to HIV Testing, Prevention, and Care Services for Street Youth"; [www.dowusa.org/wher-we-work/Russia/Russia-youth-hiv](http://www.dowusa.org/wher-we-work/Russia/Russia-youth-hiv), 12 February 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Pastor Mikhail Kozitsky, personal interview, 20 April 2007.

A Christian AIDS response means we are called to express the unconditional love of God to all in need, regardless of how they come to be so. This is fundamental to the call of the church to serve the world.

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<sup>14</sup> Sister Margarita Nelyubova, "Church Models of Leadership in HIV," Presentation at the Global Summit on AIDS and the Church, 28 November 2007.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* See also <http://www.rondtb.msk.ru>.

<sup>16</sup> Crossroads, [www.crossroadslink.org](http://www.crossroadslink.org), 12 February 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Combating HIV/AIDS, Russian Ministries, December 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Pastor Vladimir Ubeivolc, "Excellence in Global Leadership," Presentation at the Global Summit on AIDS and the Church, 29 November 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Russian Ministries, [www.russian-ministries.org](http://www.russian-ministries.org), 3 December 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Ubeivolc, "Excellence in Global Leadership."

<sup>21</sup> ACET International, [www.acet-international.org/Russia.htm](http://www.acet-international.org/Russia.htm), 18 February 2008.

<sup>22</sup> "AIDS: Christian Action and Compassion," <http://www.globalchange.com/craids.htm>, 18 February 2008.

<sup>23</sup> ACET International, [www.acet-international.org](http://www.acet-international.org), 12 February 2008.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Saddleback Church's HIV/AIDS Initiative, [www.purposedriven.net/hiv](http://www.purposedriven.net/hiv), 1 December 2007.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

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# The Balkans' Appropriation of Mother Teresa

Gëzim Alpion

## Albanians and Mother Teresa

Many Albanians apparently needed a figure like Mother Teresa during the 1990s. Known to the world mainly as economic migrants fleeing from poverty in Albania and as political refugees escaping from Serbian persecution in Kosova, Albanians found in the person, faith, celebrity status, and charity work of Mother Teresa a source of immense pride and inspiration. They felt that she had somehow restored their dented dignity. Through her, Albanians could tell the world that they should not be judged only on the basis of their poverty, that poor as some of them are, they are also an immensely spiritual and humanitarian people who "can produce inspiring figures of world stature."<sup>1</sup>

But while the pride that ordinary Albanians derived from Mother Teresa in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s was both therapeutic and genuine, the keen interest that several Albanian circles took in her was apparently motivated by the intention to further their political, nationalist, and religious causes. The growing attention Albanians began to pay to their famous expatriate, especially after her first visit to Tirana in 1989, has been noted by several Mother Teresa scholars in the West. "Within a year of her visit," notes Emma Johnson, "she had become a national hero in Albania, praised by both Christians and Muslims, and was featured on Albanian postage stamps and in its history books."<sup>2</sup>

## Mother Teresa's 1989 Homecoming Visit

Albania's "love affair" with the religious Mother Teresa, paradoxically, was initiated in the late 1980s by the country's atheistic leaders. Mother Teresa appears to have tried several times from the early 1960s onwards to obtain permission from the government of Albania to visit the country. Her requests, however, were turned down every time because Communist leader Enver Hoxha allegedly insisted on keeping her away. Following Hoxha's death in 1985, his successor, Ramiz Alia, gradually changed the long-held officially hostile attitude towards Mother Teresa because he obviously believed his government could benefit by being friendly to the nun. By allowing her to visit Albania in 1989, the country's new Communist leader wanted to signal the West that, although he had been handpicked for the post by an atheistic predecessor, he was still capable of and willing to steer Albania into a completely new direction of multi-party politics and religious tolerance.

Following Mother Teresa's 1989 visit, all Albanian politicians, those in power and those who were trying to come to power, were eager to make public as often as possible their huge admiration for the country's newly discovered "patriot" and took every opportunity to honor her. According to a 1992 presidential decree, Mother Teresa was entitled to travel on an Albanian diplomatic passport if she chose to. The Communist-turned-democrat president, Ramiz Alia, created the Mother Teresa Prize to be awarded to distinguished humanitarian and charity workers. On 27 November 1996, another Albanian president, Sali Berisha, awarded Mother Teresa the Order of the Nation's Honor. The Albanian government announced three days of national mourning when the nun passed away on 5

September 1997. Shortly after her funeral, the country's only international airport was christened Mother Teresa Airport and in Tirana, the central hospital and one of the main squares were also named after her.

Albanian veneration for Mother Teresa almost turned into a national obsession in the months prior to her beatification in 2003. The Albanian government set up a special commission headed by a minister of state to organize the activities before and after the beatification. Highly publicized events about Mother Teresa (conferences, symposia, exhibitions, the screening of documentaries and feature films, album promotions, and concerts) were held everywhere.

## Choosing a Burial Ground

Albanians, especially those adhering to the Roman Catholic faith, were eager to know where Mother Teresa wanted to be laid to rest from the moment she became internationally famous. Many celebrated Albanians living abroad over the past few centuries publicly expressed their wishes to be buried in Albania. But Mother Teresa, it seems, was not one of them. Her decision not to be buried in Albania, Kosova, or Macedonia was seen by some of her countrymen in the Balkans as unpatriotic.

While Mother Teresa's choice of Calcutta as her burial ground was another testimony to her attachment to the people of the city and of the India she undoubtedly loved and served for almost 70 years, the main reason she decided to be buried in the subcontinent was primarily linked with her lifetime mission to serve Jesus. No matter how much or how little Christianity takes root in India in the future, Mother Teresa's grave is likely to remain for a long time as a sacred spot for Christians, especially Catholics worldwide, a frontier that will constantly invite and inspire future devout followers of Christ to keep on spreading His teachings there and in other parts of the world.

The fact that Mother Teresa decided to be buried neither in Kosova, her parents' original home, nor in Skopje, her native city, indicates that she apparently had no intention of becoming another bone of contention for Albanians, Serbs, and Macedonian Slavs after her death. Her grave in Kosova or Macedonia would have been seen by fanatical Serbian and Macedonian Slav nationalists as a mecca of Albanian patriotism.

## Beatification

Mother Teresa is still venerated by ordinary Albanians of all faiths, but the enthusiasm with which Albanian politicians spoke about her in public on the eve of her beatification in October 2003 had waned considerably a year later. On the first anniversary of her beatification, many Albanians had forgotten that 19 October was meant to be a national holiday.<sup>3</sup> But it soon transpired that they were not being irreverent on purpose. The Albanian government apparently had simply failed to remind people in advance of the significance of this particular date. This mistake, of course, did not escape the attention of some opposition politicians, who used it to score points on behalf of their own parties. Albanian authorities were

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Albanians and Macedonian Slavs in their attempts to appropriate her for themselves or challenge the other party's copyright claim, missed a unique opportunity to celebrate and commemorate together the life, work, and legacy of their internationally renowned fellow citizen.

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surprisingly reluctant to organize any public event to bring to an end what was announced with so much pomp and media hype 12 months earlier as the Year of Mother Teresa. Several Albanian daily newspapers published scathing comments about Albanian politicians' obvious lack of interest to show up at any ceremony dedicated to the nation's saint on 19 October 2004, while a year earlier, they (friends and foes alike) had stampeded in droves to the Vatican to attend the beatification ceremony.<sup>4</sup>

Albanian media also expressed disappointment and even anger that, a year after the beatification, the Albanian government had not yet decided where to erect a monument dedicated to Mother Teresa.<sup>5</sup> The statue was finally unveiled on 9 December 2004 in the presence of no less than six Balkan presidents and the Prime Minister of Norway.

Like Albanian politicians, the Albanian Catholic Church is using the figure of Mother Teresa for its own purposes. Leaders of the church apparently believe that the sainted sister can be very useful in bringing this institution closer not only to Catholics but also to people of other faiths. One effective way of doing this is by highlighting time and again the nun's "devotion" to Albania. When Albanian Archbishop Rrok Mirdita returned from the nun's funeral in Calcutta in September 1997, he brought with him a rug which Albanian women apparently had given Mother Teresa as a present when she visited Albania in 1989.<sup>6</sup> Mother Teresa, we are told, prayed on this rug for eight years until the last moments of her life. The talismanic rug, which is now on display at St. Paul's Cathedral in Tirana, is apparently seen by some of Mother Teresa's ardent admirers as a sign that she had always been a confirmed patriot.

### Albanian and Macedonian Claims to Mother Teresa

Even before 2003, when the Skopje-based Albanian newspaper *Fakti* broke the news about Macedonian efforts to usurp Mother Teresa via a proposed Daughter of Macedonia statue, Balkan media have been at the forefront of a vicious campaign for exclusive rights to Mother Teresa's figure. Albanian media, in particular, were keen throughout the 1990s to present Mother Teresa as an exclusively Albanian celebrity. Many newspapers, radio and television channels, and websites appeared to be working in unison with Albanian politicians and the Albanian Catholic Church, especially from September 1997 to October 2003,

to highlight what an extraordinary patriot Mother Teresa had been throughout her life. Eager to publicize sensationalist stories and in an effort to endear Mother Teresa to the Albanian public, most Albanian dailies were ready to publish any letter written by the nun in which she referred to Albania.

Mother Teresa preached peace, understanding, tolerance, and forgiveness in India and throughout the world for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but she apparently failed to inject the same neighborly spirit into her own native Balkans. In their bitter row over her blood type, some Albanians and Macedonian Slavs showed how intolerant they are. In their attempts to appropriate her for themselves or challenge the other party's copyright claim, they missed a unique opportunity to celebrate and commemorate together the life, work, and legacy of their internationally renowned fellow citizen, the only 20<sup>th</sup> century world figure from the Balkans to present this traditionally troubled region in a new and promising way. ♦

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Anne Sebba, *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image* (London: Orion, 1997), 234-35.

<sup>2</sup> Emma Johnson, *Mother Teresa* (London: Franklin Watts, 2003), 98.

<sup>3</sup> "Festa e Nënë Terezës, administrata në punë," *Korrieri*, 20 October 2004.

<sup>4</sup> "Moisiu, Nano, Berisha e Meidani, bashkë në Vatikan," *Korrieri*, 16 October 2003.

<sup>5</sup> "Në Tiranë heshtie në ditën e Lumturimit," *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 20 October 2004; A. Meta, "19 tetori: 'Dita e Lutjes së Perbashkët'," *Korrieri*, 21 October 2004.

<sup>6</sup> "Qilimi i lutjeve në Katedralen e Shën Palit," *Korrieri*, 12 October 2003; V. Zhiti, "Institucioni i shenjtë i Nënë Terezës," *Korrieri*, 28 August 2005.

*Editor's note: The concluding portion of this article will appear in the next issue of the East West Church & Ministry Report.*

*Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Gëzim Alpi, Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity? (London: Routledge, 2006) and Routledge Publishers.*

**Gëzim Alpi** is professor of sociology at the University of Birmingham, Birmingham, England.

## Mother Teresa: Chronology

26 September 1910—Birth in Skopje, Ottoman Empire, to Albanian parents from Kosova
1928—Arrival in Dublin, Ireland, to join the Roman Catholic Order of the Sisters of Our Lady Loreto
1929—Arrival in Calcutta, India
1950—Founding of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity
1952—Opening of Mother Teresa's Pure Heart Home for the Dying
1968—Interview with BBC journalist Malcolm Muggeridge for his book, <i>Something Beautiful for God</i>
1979—Receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize
1989—First visit to Tirana, Albania
5 September 1997—Death; burial in Calcutta, India
19 October 2004—Roman Catholic bestowal of sainthood on Mother Teresa (beatification)



# New, Western-Oriented Evangelicals in Ukraine

Esther Grace Long

*Editor's note: The first portion of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church & Ministry Report 16 (Winter 2008), 4-6.*

## The Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Another example of a Western denomination actively starting new churches in Ukraine is the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), a conservative denomination that left the mainline Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1973. Through its mission agency, Mission to the World (MTW), the PCA has been working in Ukraine since 1994 and now has 10 churches in that country. Two of these are now officially independent, while the other eight are at various stages of development, from small Bible studies to a mission church with a Ukrainian pastor and board. These churches have formed a new Ukrainian denomination, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine (EPCU), which is led by Ukrainian pastors and elders. Its churches are concentrated in southern Ukraine (Izmail, Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy, Nikolaev, Kherson, and two in Odessa), with an additional three in Kyiv, one in Kharkiv, and plans for more underway, such as in L'viv. Several EPCU congregations began as Bible studies led by CoMission workers in 1994, including the two Presbyterian churches in Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy and Kherson. At the time of the fieldwork for this project, the Bilhorod congregation did not have an American church planter in residence, but the Kherson church had four full-time American missionaries in addition to a Ukrainian pastor. Several young men who attended seminary also worked part-time at the Kherson church.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine is an example of a small evangelical denomination (fewer than 1,500 members in all churches combined) whose size cannot compare to the much larger Baptist or charismatic movements. Nevertheless, it contributes to the complex, growing mosaic of Protestant churches in Ukraine. The flagship EPCU congregation in Odessa meets in a restored church building originally constructed at the end of the nineteenth century by a Reformed congregation with French, German, and Swiss members. French and German language services were held there until at least 1914, but the Soviet government confiscated the property and used it for, among other things, a puppet theater. In the mid-1990s, after MTW had begun work in Odessa and a small congregation had been formed, some of the new Ukrainian Presbyterians made contact with an elderly Reformed pastor still living in western Ukraine. He wrote a letter on behalf of the Reformed denomination declaring the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Odessa to be the physical and moral heirs of the Reformed church in that city. Odessa Presbyterians were able to use this letter in a court case. In turn, the city gave the Presbyterians the Reformed Church/puppet theater building with the expectation that the new owners would renovate the property. MTW missionaries were able to raise considerable funds in the United States, with renovations now completed.

## The Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine

The EPCU has opened a theological seminary

in Kyiv in partnership with the Ukrainian Evangelical Reformed Church (UERC). This other small denomination existed in Ukraine before the Bolshevik Revolution, with remnants surviving in several Ukrainian villages and towns during the Soviet era, mostly in the western part of the country. Despite a long history in Ukraine, by the time of Ukraine's independence, only a handful of Reformed churches existed outside Transcarpathia (a largely ethnic Hungarian region of Ukraine that had been strongly influenced by the Protestant Reformation). The Reformed Church's closest foreign partner is a Dutch denomination, the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, which has been sending missionaries and financial resources to support Ukrainian Reformed churches and the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine. The seminary, registered with the Ukrainian government in 2003, relies on professors from the Netherlands and the United States to teach modular classes several times a year for men and women seminarians who also work part-time in their home churches. The EPCU has also opened a Bible college to prepare Ukrainians who do not have a university education for eventual admission to the seminary.

## Greater Grace Church

One case study, Greater Grace Church in L'viv, falls outside the large charismatic, smaller independent, or denominational parameters. It was started by missionaries affiliated with Greater Grace Church, Baltimore, Maryland, a large independent congregation that has established over 100 churches in 54 countries. The team that started Greater Grace Church in L'viv included Americans and Poles who arrived in the early 1990s. By the time I arrived in L'viv in 2003, the Americans had all left, the church owned its own building, and it was more or less financially independent from its American home base. A businessman in the congregation had helped the church purchase a three-story storefront building within walking distance of the opera house.

The church paid its utility bills with profits from its English school, a business catering mostly to Ukrainians preparing to emigrate to the West. The church also had recently opened a Christian day school for children, although it was not yet financially independent and consisted only of kindergartners and first graders. Of the four new churches I have profiled in my research, Greater Grace was seemingly the most independent and mature. The church operated a wide variety of ministries, including an adult evening Bible school, a crisis pregnancy center, and an evangelistic mime team, and continued to grow. Attendance was about 150 people in early 2003, filling the worship hall to capacity. The church since has moved its worship services to a larger rented facility.

## Lifestyle Contrasts Between New and Traditional Evangelicals

The broad spectrum of evangelical churches in Ukraine encompasses most Protestant ideologies and practices. Some churches speak in tongues, while others forbid it. Some groups permit moderate alcohol

*(continued on page 8)*

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The Evangelical Presbyterian Church flagship congregation in Odessa meets in a restored church building originally constructed at the end of the nineteenth century by a Reformed congregation with French, German, and Swiss members.

## New, Western-Oriented Evangelicals in Ukraine *(continued from page 7)*

consumption, dancing, and card playing, while others prohibit these practices. Most churches in Ukraine believe in salvation by free will and teach that salvation can be lost; others (such as Presbyterian and Reformed churches) adhere to predestination and the doctrine of eternal security.

While some of these social and theological differences apply as well to more traditional Ukrainian churches and do not necessarily mark the divide between more indigenous congregations and Western church plants, one clearly distinguishing mark of churches begun by foreign missionaries is their willingness to move away from traditional outward signs of religious submission, particularly regarding clothing styles and cosmetics for women. In most Ukrainian Protestant churches, for example, women are required to wear skirts or dresses to worship services, while married women must cover their heads with scarves or hats. Women should have long hair and minimal makeup and jewelry. Men must wear pants, not shorts, to worship and must have short hair.

These differences came to the forefront in 1994 when the CoMission Bible study in Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy was deciding whether to join the local Baptist church or to form its own Presbyterian church. I asked the Presbyterian pastor and his wife, both of whom were converted during that initial Bible study, why they chose to form their own church rather than join a more established denomination. Dmitri and Lena shied away from the well-known behavioral restrictions in Baptist churches. Like the Nazarenes in Vinnytsia, they wanted to be able to wear any kind of clothes, dance, and take part in other activities forbidden by Baptists.

The church of the American missionaries symbolized freedom: freedom from social rules of dress and behavior, spiritual freedom (what Dmitri called “freedom in Christ”), and freedom to organize their own church from the ground up. These new Ukrainian Protestants chose to model their lives on American CoMission workers who lived with them for

one year. Dmitri said repeatedly, “We wanted to be like the people from the Presbyterian Church,” to “look like them,” to “be such people.” Because of this choice, this small group of new believers founded an Evangelical Presbyterian congregation in Bilhorod. They maintain a friendly relationship with the Baptist church in town and treat many Baptists at their Christian Medical Clinic, but they decided not to join that church.

### Conclusion

Most new Protestants who were converted to their churches by Western missionaries came out of atheistic or nominal Orthodox backgrounds. These new churches are in the process of indigenization, as Ukrainian church members assume leadership positions and Americans begin reducing financial support and leadership involvement. The EPCU, for example, became a free-standing denomination (no longer mission-status) in April 2008.

“The West” has no firm definition, but it is a place of freedom, wealth, sin, and opportunity. As used by Ukrainian evangelicals, it refers to a place outside Ukraine that includes Western Europe, Anglophone countries like Australia and Canada, and, of course and especially, the United States. The West has become an integral part of evangelical church life in post-Soviet Ukraine. It is a source of money, missionaries, and other resources, and a destination for Ukrainian church members permanently moving out of the country. Finally, the West is both loved and hated; it is credited both with helping Ukraine and with causing problems in Ukrainian churches and in the country more generally. ♦

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Esther Grace Long, “Identity in Evangelical Ukraine: Negotiating Regionalism, Nationalism, and Transnationalism,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2005.*

**Esther Grace Long** is assistant professor of geography, Morehead State University, Morehead, Kentucky.

One clearly distinguishing mark of churches begun by foreign missionaries is their willingness to move away from traditional outward signs of religious submission, particularly regarding clothing styles and cosmetics for women.

Sunday school teachers in the former Soviet Union participated in a survey of curricula conducted by the organization “Narnia Center.”

## Russian Sunday School Curricula

Irina Limonova

Sunday school teachers in the former Soviet Union participated in a survey of curricula conducted by the organization “Narnia Center” in 2003. Respondents examined teaching materials and completed a questionnaire evaluating the curricula. Among those who completed the survey were leaders of children and youth ministries and Sunday School teachers, particularly those who had teaching experience and who had firsthand familiarity with programs. Representatives of Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations and different geographical regions (Central Russia, St. Petersburg, Siberia, Far East, and Moldova) participated in the survey. Those surveyed evaluated five Sunday school curricula.

### “Keys,” Bogomyslie Publishing House, Odessa

“Keys” teaching aids, which come in colorful, cardboard folders, are widely used in evangelical churches. The curricula cover three age groups (3-6,

7-11, and 12-16). Lessons are designed in such a way that children are able to study all 66 books of the Bible over a period of 15 years at three different age levels. “Keys” provides all the materials needed for teachers’ preparation of lessons: a master plan, a synopsis of each lesson, visual aids, charts, questionnaires, music and words for songs, and student texts.

#### Notes:

- Lessons are related to church holidays.
- The formulation of lesson goals is quite precise. However, for the youngest group, survey participants suggest the replacement of vague formulations with more specific ones.
- Lessons encourage reflection on biblical interpretation and biblical understanding, but real world applications are not always provided.
- Lessons concentrate more on Christian upbringing than on evangelism.

## Russian Sunday School Curricula

- Some respondents recommended enriching the lesson language with “special effects” such as onomatopoeia. Some participants advised a greater use of color in teaching aids, but it is worth mentioning that color printing is costly.
- Not all participants consider this curricula to be affordable. Because of cost, in many evangelical churches “Keys” is used piecemeal, losing the value of its built-in continuity.
- The main merits of “Keys” are its overall structure, the transition from one school year to another and from one age group to another, and the detailed plans and synopses for each of the lessons.

Contact Information: Box 30, Odessa 65069, Ukraine; tel: 0482-528736; e-mail: bogomyslie@farler.net.

### “Go and Teach,” Khristianskoye Prosvesheniye Publishing House, Odessa

“Go and Teach” is a Russian translation of a widely known European curriculum that, unfortunately, is not as well-known in Russia as it is in Ukraine. The program has a precise structure: three-year cycles of studies for each of four age groups (3-5, 6-8, 9-11, and 12-15). Each graded series is composed of 13 lessons and includes a complete set of teacher aids: synopses of lessons, methods guide, comments on biblical texts, and a set of visual aids. A teacher’s supplement, “Come and Study,” outlines assignments and provides drawings and lists of materials needed for craft projects.

- This curriculum is not closely tied to the sequence of church holidays, but if the teacher desires, connections can easily be established. A significant advantage of this curriculum is the ease with which it can be started at any point in the sequence of lessons.
- Lessons are clearly described. However, at the same time, they leave room for imagination and creativity; and each element of a lesson can easily be elaborated or replaced.
- Lesson plans are simple to follow and can easily be used even by beginning teachers. Nevertheless, experienced teachers positively evaluated the lesson aids.
- A student workbook, “Come and Learn,” covers the same topics as the teacher’s guide. While it excludes planning materials, it adds drawings, crosswords, and questions. Workbook layout is simple, but quite attractive, and children enjoy the lessons. Lessons are of interest to both young believers and to those who are not yet Christians.
- The biblical interpretation offered in this curriculum corresponds closely to that offered by a majority of Russian-speaking Protestant churches.
- The main advantage of this curriculum is the clear connection between the lessons taught and their real-life applications.
- Lessons stress children’s repentance and commitment of their lives to God. The curriculum also covers the Ten Commandments, kindness towards neighbors, and prayer.
- The curriculum touches all three spheres of human life: intellectual, emotional, and volitional.
- The material employs easily understood language. However, translations are sometimes incorrect

and misleading. A more serious defect is the use of examples that have no connection to Russian reality. In any case, it is possible for teachers to give their own examples that are more relevant to the Russian context.

- Many survey participants stated that this curriculum is quite affordable. Wholesale, volume discounts are available.

Contact Information: Box 105, Odessa 65025, Ukraine; tel: 048-711-41-60; e-mail: ihp@paco.net; website: www.books.odessa.ua.

### “Light of Truth,” Bible for Everyone Publishing House, St. Petersburg

“Light of Truth,” designed for kindergarteners and elementary, middle, and high school students, consists of 18 series. Each series is assigned for three months and includes 13 lessons. “Light of Truth” provides lesson plans and advice for use of visual aids. Graded student workbooks, covering three age groups, supplement lessons with crosswords, coloring pages, and creative assignments.

- Prices for “Light of Truth” are reasonable.
- Among positive aspects of the curriculum, respondents noted the visual aids, teacher’s guide, and recommendations for each lesson.
- Respondents noted a lack of colorful pictures and poor design.
- One surveyed teacher commented that in the kindergarten curriculum seven lessons treated spiritual growth while six were devoted to evangelism. For those children who have already accepted Jesus, the last six lessons would not be appropriate. “A child has to grow spiritually somehow.”

Contact Information: Akademika Lebedeva Ulitsa 31, St. Petersburg 195009, Russia; e-mail: bible@peterlink.ru; website: www.bible.org.ru.

### “Sunday School for Everyone,” Evangelical Christian-Baptist Sunday School Department, Moscow

Experienced Evangelical Christian-Baptist teachers in Moscow developed “Sunday School for Everyone” not only for children, but for adults and teenagers as well. The curriculum is appropriate for both church members and new Christians.

- Prices are quite affordable.
- The separate teacher’s guide has quite rich content that is especially useful for experienced teachers.
- Student workbooks are bright with colorful visual aids offered for kindergarteners. Assignments correspond very well to students’ age levels. The only suggestion expressed by respondents was to enlarge the text font in the teaching aids.
- While the curriculum reflects Baptist teaching, the biblical interpretation makes this series acceptable for use in any Protestant church. The lessons, which draw upon commentaries and additional literature, encourage in-depth Bible study.
- The materials are professionally designed.
- While the language generally is understandable, it may be somewhat complicated for the beginning teacher.

(continued on page 10)

## Russian Sunday School Curricula (continued from page 9)

Contact Information: Box 468, Moscow 113105, Russia; tel/fax: 495-958-60-58; e-mail:bible@dataforce.net.

### “New Life,” Life Publishers Publishing House, Moscow

“New Life,” an English-language curriculum translated into Russian, covers five age groups (4-5, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, and 15-17). This curriculum is divided into six series for each group, with visual aids for younger children.

#### Notes:

- Respondents commented that prices for materials were relatively high.
- The curriculum is connected to church holidays.
- The teacher’s guide provides detailed plans and a synopsis for each lesson.
- The curriculum reflects the teaching of Pentecostal

churches.

- Participants’ responses were in general positive. However, goals for lessons were said to be imprecise. Also, surveyed teachers pointed out that lessons tended to be monotonous, sometimes resembling long sermons with little application to daily life. On the positive side, the curriculum received positive marks for colorful visual aids and the development of separate sets of lessons for younger and older teenagers. ♦

Contact Information: Stromynka Ulitsa 11, 1/1, kv. 410, Moscow 107014, Russia; tel/fax: 495-269-1154; 725-4792; 735-3804.

*Irina Limonova, from St. Petersburg, Russia, is an editor for the newspaper, The Context of Your Life.*

## Tech Schools for Russian Orphans: Failing the Grade

Cristi Hillis

#### Editor’s note:

*The present article is excerpted from the author’s 2006 Davidson College senior thesis examining conditions in Russian vocational schools that enroll orphan graduates exclusively. Often referred to as tech schools in English, these professional’noe tekhnicheskoe uchilishche, or PTUs for short, offer training in such trades as metalworking, woodworking, cooking, and barbering.*

*In addition to a review of relevant Russian- and English-language literature, Hillis interviewed government officials, PTU directors, PTU dorm caretakers, leaders of charities working with orphans in PTUs, and the students themselves. Written surveys proved less effective than extended, informal discussions with students (thereby gaining their trust). While living in Russia, January to May 2004, the author spent an average of 15 hours per week with students at three tech schools in St. Petersburg and one in Voronezh.*

#### Grim Statistics

According to the Russian Procuracy General, around 15,000 youth “graduate” from the nation’s orphanages annually. Within a few years of graduation, 5,000 of these graduates are unemployed, 6,000 are homeless, 3,000 have criminal records, and 1,500 have committed suicide.<sup>1</sup>

Interviews with Russian officials confirm these grim statistics. Without exception, directors of all seven PTUs for orphans in St. Petersburg whom I interviewed, as well as the director of the PTU in Voronezh, said that about 10 percent of their students “survive” once they leave the PTUs. The Minister of Education for St. Petersburg, Nikolai Pavlovich Nikolayev, also confirmed the 10 percent “survival” rate. When asked what they meant by the word “survive,” these officials replied that it referred to some minimum level of living: not going into prostitution, not going to prison, not committing suicide, etc.

#### PTU 116 Firsthand

*Editor’s Note: The author’s firsthand description of PTU 116 is representative in the sense that it is neither the best (PTU 90) nor the worst (PTU 35) tech school she examined.*

PTU 116, a large, red-brick building, looms over a snowy parking lot on the outskirts of St. Petersburg. A secretary meets me at the door and guides me through long, empty halls with dark brown paneling. The halls smell strongly of stale cigarette smoke; we see no students. Eventually, we reach the door of the PTU director, Yuri Gorkin (not his real name). He invites me in and begins to tell me about the PTU. I hear glowing statements about what he has done for students, even with limited funding. He gives me tea and cookies.

After awhile, I excuse myself to find a bathroom. I wander down the hall until I see a door. Inside, two girls are smoking and smell strongly of body odor. I slip past them but instead of finding a toilet, I find a hole in the ground plastered with a mixture of mud and urine. I hesitate to enter, overwhelmed by the stench. The bare walls provide no sink in which to wash my hands.

Hours later, I leave the PTU and walk around outside, meeting some of the students. Despite the snow, Grisha (not his real name) stands and talks with me, stomping his feet for warmth and rubbing his bare hands. (At PTU 116, students often prefer the freezing outdoors to the crowded, smoky interior corridors.) Grisha speaks of the difference between the orphanage and the PTU.

“In the orphanage, I knew everyone,” he maintained nostalgically. “We were like family. Here, we don’t know each other. We share a room and do not talk. Mostly they will not hurt me, but they do not care. I live my life; they live theirs. Outside, it is different. On the streets, people know you’re an orphan—they see your clothes, your dirty faces, your shifty eyes. Outside, I have to be

Around 15,000 youth “graduate” from the nation’s orphanages annually. Within a few years of graduation, 5,000 are unemployed, 6,000 are homeless, 3,000 have criminal records, and 1,500 have committed suicide.

## Tech Schools for Russian Orphans: Failing the Grade

really careful. I have to always have one eye open. Outside, people knife you for your money.”

At this point, Grisha’s eyes grow cloudy. “My older brother, Vanya, left the PTU a few years ago, when he was 21. Before he was 22, someone killed him for a few rubles. They found his body in a dumpster. Now I am careful.”

### Material Conditions

PTU 116, one of the largest PTUs for orphans in St. Petersburg, houses over 200 students. Here the government meets the physical needs of orphans fairly well. Their clothes, though dirtier and more worn than those of students in PTU 90, are acceptable for the winter. Though Grisha did not have warm boots or gloves, he had a thick winter coat and closed-toe shoes. The meals I ate with PTU 116 students were tasteless and bland (mostly consisting of vegetable soup), but filling. The food they receive is sufficient; students told me that they rarely went to bed on an empty stomach. However, they did resignedly mention that they receive little health care. The few available places are far away and crowded, and the orphans doubted the quality of medical care. The director of PTU 116 suspects that drug use is quite high in his school. Perhaps as a result, the past few years have seen an increasing number of PTU HIV cases.

### Issues of Safety, Isolation, and Self-Esteem

The students I spoke with in PTU 116 all felt fairly safe inside. Though some had gotten in scuffles over the past year, few had been seriously injured. Though the students felt safe inside their own dormitories, Grisha suggested that they did not feel safe outside, perhaps because of the neighborhood.

As in PTU 90, students at 116 tended to feel lonely and isolated. PTU 116 enrolls orphans from all over St. Petersburg, many having had no previous contact with one another. Grisha’s comments spoke to the difficulties many have in establishing this contact. He also spoke frequently and dejectedly about always having to fight for himself because no one else would: the constant competition for survival—for the largest bowl of soup, the warmest jacket. This competition keeps students always on the defensive, never able to let down their barriers

### Review

Grant, Beth and Cindy Lopez Hudlin. *Hands That Heal: International Curriculum to Train Caregivers of Trafficking Survivors*. (Faith Alliance against Slavery and Trafficking, 2007). Reviewed by Oleg Turlac.

*Hands That Heal* is a set of training manuals dealing with human trafficking, a “business” earning \$33.9 billion annually, just behind illicit drugs and weapons trade in profitability. It is a valuable tool for creating awareness and educating people worldwide concerning the problem of trafficking in women and children for sexual slavery. The manuals were published in 2007 by the Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST) with the participation of the Salvation Army, World Hope International, World Relief, and Project Rescue International (Assemblies of God World Missions). Published materials include

and be vulnerable with each other.

As with PTU 90, students at 116 suffered from a lack of self-esteem, which led them to believe that they cannot succeed in life. When asked about their life dreams and goals, I primarily received answers such as “to have a job where I’ll be able to get by. And maybe have an apartment, even if it is only one room.” Very few, however, felt that they could achieve this goal. In many ways, their negative assessment is probably realistic. For the average Russian, with the housing shortage, getting an apartment can be extremely difficult. Russian government statistics claim that only five percent of families who registered to receive new dwellings in 2004 received those dwellings.<sup>2</sup> If the rate is so low for the average Russian, then naturally orphans have an extremely difficult time receiving housing.

Students at 116 come from better orphanages and are considered to have higher intellectual ability than students judged to have less ability who attend poorer PTUs. Therefore, the system in theory offers students at 116 more lucrative professions, such as woodworking and cooking. Though the students here train for jobs that potentially offer average salaries, the orphans still have to combat the same basic problem of wary employers being unwilling to hire them. ♦

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Hunt, *Abandoned to the State: Cruelty and Neglect in Russian Orphanages* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1998), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Federal State Statistics Service, Provision of Dwellings to Population, [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b05\\_12/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d000/07-18.htm](http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b05_12/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d000/07-18.htm) (accessed 26 March 2006).

*Editor’s note: The conclusion of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church & Ministry Report.*

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Cristi Hillis, “What Do They Need to Survive? Addressing the Needs of Adolescent Russian Orphans,” Senior thesis, Davidson College, 2006.*

**Cristi Hillis is Project Coordinator for the CoMission for Children at Risk.**

a one-volume academic edition and a two-volume community-based edition. An accompanying CD-ROM contains numerous resources including *Human Trafficking in the United States, A Manual for Hospice Care*, and *Survivor Stories*.

Being a native of Moldova, the East European country that is among the front-line exporters of women and children for prostitution and slave labor, I can appreciate the value of this curriculum written from a Christian perspective. It emphasizes that a Christian response to survivors of sex slavery requires a truly biblical perspective on women and girls, affirming that each life is unique and sacred.

The curriculum is designed to assist those working in the field in helping trafficked women and children put their lives back together. It also provides shocking data about the present state of the

*(continued on page 14)*

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# A Case Study of Evangelical, Non-Formal, Leadership Development

David E. Sveen with Mark R. Elliott

## Pitfalls of Study Abroad

Many evangelical church leaders in Central and Eastern Europe have expressed reservations about sending their pastors to North America for training. In addition to the high level of English proficiency required and the high cost, home churches suffer when their leaders are away for extended periods of time. Also, church leaders believe it is best for pastors to be trained within their own cultural context. Finally, for those with families, study abroad can mean painful time away from spouses and children. And if families accompany pastors studying abroad, these dependents can become so acculturated to the West that they do not want to return home or have a difficult cultural readjustment upon returning home. Worst of all, in terms of developing the church in Central and Eastern Europe, some trained leaders and/or their families choose not to return home.

## Authoritarian Leadership . . .

At the same time, many evangelicals from Central and Eastern Europe have recognized the shortcomings of what they describe as a totalitarian style of pastoral leadership in their churches. According to Nick Nedelchev, president of the Bulgarian Theological Institute in Sofia, "There is a desperate need for change from an authoritarian model toward more shepherd-like leadership. Mainly due to the decades of life under a communistic totalitarian regime, most church leaders in Southeast Europe have adopted the same model within the church. It maintains some structural stability but leads to a lack of true discipleship (since leaders view themselves as rulers rather than mentors or helpers), estrangement from the people, and lack of accountability." (Sopron, Hungary, "Lessons from European Leadership," May 2003.)

Fear, suspicion, and a general lack of trust, bred under Communism, continue to afflict post-Soviet societies in Central and Eastern Europe, including evangelical churches. One Western missionary serving in the Czech Republic notes a "hesitancy of men to step up and lead. There's a picture of whoever steps up will get their head chopped off." One Czech proverb underscores the point: "The tallest blade of grass gets cut first."

## . . . Versus Servant Leadership

Josiah Venture (JV) is a Western ministry that has seen the need in Central and Eastern Europe for evangelical leadership training that emphasizes serving, rather than controlling, the church. Established in 1993 in the United States, its work originally centered on the development of evangelical youth leaders in the Czech Republic through conferences, retreats, and training programs. An independent ministry since 2001, JV now directs a multi-national staff of over 150 full-time youth ministry specialists working in ten countries: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Moldova, Slovenia, Ukraine, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Croatia (<http://www.josiahventure.com/locations>).

## The Staz Leadership Internship Program

The present research centers on a non-formal, one-year internship program called *Staz*, the Czech word for *internship*, which was launched by Josiah Venture in 1996. Sending churches typically supported their interns up to 30 percent of costs, while Josiah Venture assumed 70 percent of expenses, covering room and board, books, mission trips, and a small stipend.

Findings cover 1996 to 2003, based on interviews with seven of the program's ten administrators, and 20 of its 114 graduates as of 2003. Administrators, who were Czech (2), Slovak (1), and U.S. (1) citizens, all had university educations, with two having master's degrees. The seven men and three women administrators ranged in age from 27 to 45. However, findings were drawn only from full-time staff who were all male. All administrators were married with children. Research was conducted in three cities of the Czech Republic: Prague, Malenovice, and Pisek; and two cities in Slovakia: Bratislava and Zilina.

Graduates of this non-formal internship program were predominantly from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with less than a dozen from other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Approximately two-thirds were men and one-third women. Most *Staz* graduates were between the ages of 21 and 40 during their internships. All graduates had at least a high school degree, with approximately half of those with trade school training in fields such as construction, transportation, and auto mechanics. Approximately 30 percent had university education with degrees in education, physics, chemistry, business management, and architecture. Most became followers of Jesus Christ after the political changes of 1989. All were active volunteers in youth ministry prior to enrolling in the *Staz* program.

Prior to the *Staz* program, participating interns had viewed church leaders as unattached or distant from those they led. By way of contrast, *Staz* administrators modeled servant leadership and evidenced love for those they led. In addition, they demonstrated genuine care for their charges by spending time with interns and serving alongside them on mission trips.

The *Staz* program intentionally placed interns in close physical, spiritual, and emotional proximity to Josiah Venture administrators and staff. Interns and JV administrators spent a significant amount of time together sharing meals, taking walks, driving together to mission trip locations, and debriefing each day's events over a cup of coffee at a local café. Furthermore, JV administrators invited interns into their homes for dinner. In contrast to graduates' previous educational experience involving pronounced distance between students and teachers, the *Staz* program minimized that distance.

## Experiential Learning

The methodology of this non-formal leadership training involved experiential learning with teachers working alongside interns in short-term mission projects. Instructors modeled as well as taught

Josiah Venture is a Western ministry that has seen the need in Central and Eastern Europe for evangelical leadership training that emphasizes serving, rather than controlling, the church.

## A Case Study of Evangelical, Non-Formal, Leadership Development

leadership in an atmosphere that encouraged faculty-student dialogue and interaction outside as well as inside the classroom. As one participant reported, "There was a lot of room for practicing things. I was forced to do some things I wouldn't naturally do or I didn't think I could do. The leader does something, then the leader does something with me, and then the leader watches me while I do it." This practical emphasis in the *Staz* program was reflected in the division of time spent during the internship on instruction (approximately 40 percent) versus hands-on ministry, practical training, and special projects (approximately 60 percent).

*Staz* instructors questioned and probed interns' reasoning or perspective on course material presented in formal seminars. They challenged interns to dig deeply into their assumptions and to think critically about what they believed about leadership. The methodology of the entire internship experience hinged on leadership theory demonstrated in practice. For example, as *Staz* leaders avoided the use of pirated software and bootlegged DVDs, they moved beyond teaching integrity to modeling integrity, thus

leading by example, rather than directive.

In summary, the success of Josiah Venture's leadership internship program centered on the creation of an atmosphere that was conducive to learning and the use of methodologies (infrequently employed in Central and Eastern Europe) that were equally conducive to learning. The educational environment stressed love, concern, collegiality, and care while the learning methods stressed hands-on experience, dialogue, and interchange between instructor and intern, and time together in a variety of contexts involving practical application of theory. ♦

*Edited excerpts published with permission from David E. Sveen, "Leadership Development as a Non-formal Learning Experience in Central and Eastern Europe," Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004.*

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## Love as the Basis for Friendship Evangelism

Sergei V. Nikolaev

### Tough Times in the 1990s

Russia's abrupt and flawed transition to a market economy in the early 1990s left many people in the former Soviet Union in greater poverty than they had ever known. Salaries were either not paid or, when paid, were insufficient to buy necessary staples. Many people lost their jobs as previously state-supported industries and institutions lost funding. Life was difficult for most people of the former Soviet Union as they tried to understand and survive in this new world. The United Methodist Church answered the need of the Russian people by providing many shipments of humanitarian aid, volunteers who helped to repair orphanages and Russian Orthodox churches, and other projects. In those hard years in the 1990s, the kindness of United Methodist Christians and their willingness to provide people with their first, free Bible resulted in continuing growth of interest in Methodism.

American and Korean United Methodist missionaries also found an eager response as Russians desired to make the acquaintance of their former "enemies." The answers that many found in their search for meaning encouraged some who had never been to any church to make the United Methodist Church their spiritual home. This resulted in the rapid growth of the church in those years.

In Russia's United Methodist churches people found hope, not only for the present, but for eternity. Hope was hard to find in those days, with most people despairing of even surviving. The church also provided warmth and fellowship. At that time, when it was difficult to know whom to trust and what to believe, the openness and joy of United Methodist Christians in Russia was especially inviting.

after the fall of Communism, the situation in Russia has changed drastically. Today, the Russian economy is doing very well, and many people, especially in the larger cities, have confidence that their lives will continue to improve. The Russian Orthodox Church, too, has increased its power and position in Russian society. While many Russians are still atheistic in their beliefs, a significant portion of Russian society has accepted the Russian Orthodox Church as an inherent part of its cultural heritage. Using this claim to heritage, the Russian Orthodox Church has been pushing for harsher legislation against non-Orthodox churches and for mandatory classes in Russian Orthodoxy in public schools.

### Defining Proselytism

Another component that makes evangelization a particularly sensitive subject is the charge of the Russian Orthodox Church that virtually any evangelization activity is proselytism. The United Methodist Church, in fact, is evangelizing by reaching out to those who do not attend church and who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not trying to proselytize Orthodox Christians to another form of Christianity. Methodist theologian William J. Abraham has formulated an understanding of evangelism that is receiving more and more recognition among Russian United Methodists. In his book, *The Logic of Evangelism*, Abraham calls evangelism a "set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time." Nonetheless, any evangelistic activities must also be sensitive to the Russian Orthodox Church. All these changes have made the previous methods of evangelization ineffective.

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### Changed Circumstances

Today, however, more than a decade and a half

(continued on page 13)

### Evangelism at Its Best

The United Methodist Church in Eurasia has recognized the necessity for new approaches to reaching out to people in need of a relationship with Jesus Christ. One creative innovation has been the inauguration of a United Methodist Annual Competition for the Best Evangelism Project. Leaders gifted in the ministry of evangelism share their practices and experiences with pastors and lay leaders in all United Methodist annual conferences in Eurasia, answering their questions, encouraging dialogue, and promoting excellence in evangelism. Thus, the competition aims to lay the groundwork for creating a robust and indigenous culture of evangelism within the church.

One outstanding evangelism servant in the past dozen years in Russia was Lydia Mikhailova, a pastor in the Russia United Methodist Church and the first district superintendent of the South Moscow District. She participated in the development of the original idea of the Competition for the Best Evangelism Project. Lydia was in her forties in 1994 when her husband died of cancer, leaving her with two young sons. She certainly was no stranger to trials. Born into a family that had been exiled from Ukraine to the Russian Far North to work in a timber-felling labor camp, Lydia had spent the early years of her life barely able to survive. The family was rehabilitated only after Stalin's death. Still, the death of her husband sent her into depression. Grief-stricken, Lydia sought solace, which she found when a friend invited her to a church service at the United Methodist Church in Lytkarino, outside Moscow. Blessed by the comfort that only Christ can give, Lydia spent the rest of her life telling others about the good news.

### Friendship Evangelism: Despite All Odds

Lydia came to the church through friendship evangelism, and she practiced that method of evangelism whenever she could. She was a "preacher of evangelistic love." She found many ways to reach people with the gospel. Rather than becoming hardened by her tragic experiences and difficult

past or forgetting about it as many try to do, Lydia conquered her past with God's love. It can be said that love truly triumphed in her life. One outcome of this great love was her work to start a church in the Far North, where her family had once been imprisoned, as an evangelism project from her church in Moscow, where she served as pastor.

Although she died of stomach cancer a little more than ten years after her husband's death, this decade was one of great joy and great fruit in her Kingdom service. In the two local churches that she pastored during her ministry (the majority of the district superintendents in Eurasia combine their ministry with service as pastors in local churches), as a skillful administrator, Lydia was able to secure buildings for both congregations. This was a great achievement in an extremely expensive Russian real-estate market and an urgent and primary need for each United Methodist congregation. People with broken hearts came to her churches and received healing and a genuine desire to live as people transformed through Christ. Both of her churches grew into two of the strongest in the district.

Even as she lay in the hospital three weeks before her death, she shared the gospel message and read the Bible to the other women in her ward. When she was sent home for her final days, the women cried and begged her not to leave them, so meaningful had been her ministry to them, even in her own time of weakness and disease. Lydia has left her church a powerful legacy. In her memory, the administrative council of the United Methodist Church in Russia established the Lydia Mikhailova Evangelism Fund to encourage the church to continue its emphasis on evangelization. ♦

*Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Sergei V. Nikolaev, "Teaching Evangelism in Russia," New World Outlook 97 (May/June 2007): 25-27.*

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### Review (continued from page 11)

trafficking industry and points out practical ways of helping those who have been trafficked to return to a normal life.

One of the authors' goals is to provide an academic undergraduate curriculum that can be used in Christian universities and seminaries across the globe to introduce future ministers and social workers to the problem of trafficking and the needs of survivors. The curriculum could also be used by community groups that have a burden for women and girls who have been trafficked for prostitution.

Both the academic and community-based manuals are divided into 13 units, dealing with prostitution and commercial sexual exploitation, gender-related issues in trafficking, and the biblical framework for a Christian response to human trafficking. The curriculum serves as a helpful tool in understanding the physical, psychological, spiritual, social, and cultural

needs of survivors. Each section provides discussion questions, recommends learning activities, and helpful Scripture references.

While these resources are available free of charge, suggested donations are \$75 for the complete package, including the CD-ROM; \$45 for the academic edition, plus the CD-ROM; \$30 for the community-based edition, plus the CD-ROM. Contact FFAST, 625 Slaters Lane, Suite 200, Alexandria, Virginia, 22314; 888-466-4673 (toll-free); FFAST@worldhope.net; <http://www.faastinternational.org>.

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Even as she lay in the hospital three weeks before her death, she shared the gospel message and read the Bible to the other women in her ward. When she was sent home for her final days, the women cried and begged her not to leave.

### Christianity Equated with Education and Enlightenment

The theme of progress was also evoked when Christians stressed that better education would automatically precipitate conversion. "If a person is educated and so is his family, then they shouldn't have a problem arriving at certain conclusions when reviewing our history. And if they are educated and understanding, then they shouldn't forbid their children to become Christian." Likewise, baptized Ajarians said that although their conversion had provoked negative reactions, "the educated people" had supported them. According to the converts, educated people recognized the importance of Christianity in the project of modernization.

Among the 64 adult Christians about whom I collected sufficient information, there were 22 teachers, six civil servants working at the town or the district (*raion*) administration, five nurses, and four physicians and other medical specialists; the remaining 27 people had occupations such as housewife or bookkeeper or formerly held a position (mostly middle management) at one of the clothing factories in town. They were almost exclusively representatives of the educated "middle class," while farmers and technicians (former *kolkhozniki*) were virtually absent among the new Christians.

The middle-class families valued education and sent their children to Batumi, Tbilisi, or other cities to attend the university. Members of these families took up positions in state structures and often lived part of their lives outside Khulo, mostly in the urban areas in Georgia.

The emphasis that converts put on their relationships and their social environment does not

negate the sincerity of their belief in Christianity, but it does suggest that their life experiences played a major role in their acceptance of the Christian message. The prevalent idea among some converts that once people became educated, they would adopt Christianity was therefore true enough, albeit in a slightly different way than they saw it. It was not education as such, but the content of this education (with a strong focus on Georgian history) and the context in which this education took place (higher education was always located on Georgian "Christian" territory) that made "educated people" more receptive to the Christian message.

Proponents of Christianity cashed in on societal changes facilitated by Soviet rule and on a nationalist ideology that imagined Georgia as a coherent Christian nation surrounded by dangerous and "foreign" Muslim peoples. The fact that regional elites either had been Christian all along or relatively quickly converted to Christianity further contributed to the "Christianization" of the public sphere. These elites used their influence to establish Christian schools and to introduce Bible studies as an obligatory subject in "secular" education. Moreover, they excluded Muslim voices from the media and from scholarly writings. ♦

*Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Mathijs Pelkmans, Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).*

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### Film Review

"Russia" in the series, "Faultlines: The Search for Political and Religious Links." 2004. www.films.com. \$129.95 for VHS or DVD. Reviewed by Mark R. Elliott.

This 37-minute documentary, in DVD and video formats, is one of a series of six case studies of the interaction of faith and politics. (The five companion films examine religion and politics in Israel, Iran, Brazil, India, and the U.S.) Written and produced by former Beirut hostage John McCarthy, "Russia" is an informative and reasonably balanced introduction to four of post-Soviet Russia's faith traditions: Russian Orthodoxy, Protestantism (as illustrated by the Salvation Army), Catholicism, and Islam.

Given the series' advocacy for religious tolerance and even-handed treatment of all faiths, it comes as no surprise that Russian state and Orthodox discrimination against Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims would be decried. Ironically, given Islam's privileged status elsewhere, a Russian Muslim leader speaks for all minority faiths in warning of the dangers of state privileges afforded one religious expression (Orthodox) over others.

One of the documentary's great strengths is its refusal to portray Russian Orthodoxy as monolithic. Viewers come to see that within its expansive fold one finds supporters and opponents of ecumenism, believers tolerant and intolerant of minority faiths, and adherents favorably disposed towards and hostile towards the West.

Still, on the whole, the treatment of Orthodoxy is more

negative than positive: Orthodox believers are depicted as too often nominal in their faith, superstitious, antagonistic towards "sects" (which they accuse of stealing souls), and distrustful of democracy. On the other hand, arguably the most attractive believer in the film is Russian Orthodox: Anna Goussova is devoutly Orthodox, yet she is employed by the Protestant Salvation Army, whose charitable work she applauds. In 2002 Anna was among some 800 victims taken hostage by Chechen Muslim terrorists in Moscow's Dubrovka Theater. She had the courage to pray out loud during her captivity, and, despite injuries requiring hospitalization (not noted in the film), she nevertheless remains charitably disposed towards Muslims as a whole.

The documentary does overlook important groups including Jews, Baptists, and Pentecostals. Also, a few missteps can be noted. The original Cathedral of Christ the Savior was completed in the late, not early, 19<sup>th</sup> century. It also can be argued that the battle for Russian souls is just as intense in some provinces as it is in Moscow. Finally, one person interviewed cautions that Russia should not be judged by Moscow alone, yet the film crew still spends most of its time in the capital. These minor caveats aside, "Russia" does a credible job of introducing faith in Russia and the tensions inherent in Russian church-state relations.

*Mark R. Elliott is editor of the East-West Church & Ministry Report.*

"Russia" is an informative and reasonably balanced introduction to four of post-Soviet Russia's faith traditions: Russian Orthodoxy, Protestantism (as illustrated by the Salvation Army), Catholicism, and Islam.



## Religious Conversions in Ajaria, Georgia

Mathijs Pelkmans

*Editor's note: Previous portions of this article were published in the East-West Church & Ministry Report 15 (Fall 2007), 6-8; and 16 (Winter 2008), 12-13.*

Through imaginings of the progressive nature of Christianity and its favorable comparison with "backward Turks," Christianity contained a promise, one of progress and unambiguous (re)connection of Ajaria with "civilized" Georgian society.

### Continuity

Although non-Christians in Ajaria frequently employed the verb "to convert" (*perekhodit*) to describe the actions of new Christians, many converts did not use the word because of the unwanted connotation of change. What they had experienced should, in their view, not be understood as a personal change or disruption but rather a regaining of the true self in Christianity. Conversion enabled a return to, not a new embrace of, Christianity. A young woman in Khulo expressed this notion directly: "I don't have the feeling that I am switching from one to another religion. No! I have *returned* to my native religion."

Tamaz, for example, stressed that Ajaria was historically Christian and that Christianity was the religion to which his forefathers adhered. He portrayed his conversion not as a change to something new but as the continuation of Christianity that had remained part of his Georgian culture, even through periods of interruptions. These notions were made meaningful by reference to the distant past, a past in which Ajarians were Christian.

### Enemies

When new Christians talked about history or culture, it was often in opposition to the "other," which manifested itself in speech as "the Turk," "the Ottoman," or more broadly as "Muslims" and was presented as radically different from the "self." The "other" was simultaneously a religious and a cultural "other." This was well captured in the statement by a young woman who had been baptized several years earlier: "When I read the Qur'an, I do not recognize anything. It is not about our people, not about Georgians. In contrast, when I started to read the Bible, I recognized everything; everything struck me as familiar. The Bible is about people like me." In this short comment, Islam and Christianity were neatly opposed. The Bible was presented as a book about

Georgians. It was contrasted with the Qur'an, whose messages were portrayed as alien.

Significantly, the comments were not only about difference but also about danger. Muslims were thought of as having done a great injustice to the Georgians generally and to the inhabitants of Ajaria specifically, as the next comment shows: "I used to have nothing to do with religion; I was a simple farmer, although once in a while I went to the old [closed] church out of curiosity. But I did read a lot, for example, that the Turks had cut off 300 heads and thrown them in to the Chorokhi [River] and then sent a message to Skhalta that the same thing would happen there if people didn't submit to Islam." Similar stories about the cruelties of the "Turks" or the "Ottoman Empire" were told over and over again.

### Christianity Equated with Progress

In the previous sections, I argued that conversion was imagined as a return to a glorious Christian past and that the stories that were told about becoming Christian underlined the converts' national affiliation through an oppositional "other." Important as these aspects were for legitimizing the *personal* adoption of Christianity, the "past" and the "other" also played an important role in ideas about the region as a *whole*. New Christians endorsed the idea that the "backwardness" of Ajaria could be eliminated by the "return" to Christianity. Through imaginings of the progressive nature of Christianity and its favorable comparison with "backward Turks," Christianity contained a promise, one of progress and unambiguous (re)connection of Ajaria with "civilized" Georgian society.

New Christians, but also people without clear religious predilections, worried about the possible strength of Islam in Upper Ajaria. One person told me, "There simply can't [shouldn't] be a future for Islam. It is a dark, dark religion. It turns people into slaves of Allah." A lecturer from the University of Batumi similarly invoked the idea of Islam's backwardness. An encounter with an imam led him to express his worries about the activities of Muslim leaders: "You know what would happen if they were in control? They would send us straight back to the Arabia of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, to Muhammad and his camels." The alleged regressive characteristics of Islam were placed in unambiguous contrast to the achievements of Christianity. Once, when visiting one of the medieval bridges across the Ach'aristsqali River, a Christian acquaintance told me the following: "Can you imagine, they [the Ottomans] ruled here for four centuries and during that period not a single bridge or monument was constructed, whereas these ingenious bridges were already built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when Ajaria was Christian. Architects would not be able to construct them even today." The medieval monuments and bridges were symbols of a desirable and unambiguous connection with the rest of Georgia. What the new Christians aimed for was to be a part of "civilized" Georgian society. For converts the "return" to a Christian past contained promises for the future.

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